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Ford Stands by Warren Panel Findings

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Despite the crescendo of criticisms in the past 14 years, former president Gerald Ford said yesterday that he still has no misgivings about the findings of the Warren Commission in the assassination of President Kennedy.

CIA assassination plots against Fidel Castro and FBI destruction of evidence notwithstanding, Ford told the House Assassinations Committee that, "To date, I have seen no new evidence that would change my views."

He blamed the distortions of critics, public cynicism toward government and a general unfamiliarity with the commission's work for the disrepute into which it has fallen.

Backed up by the commission's two other surviving members, Ford said: "We believe the report, despite the criticisms of 14 years, was an authoritative document." Speaking for himself, he added: "I categorically deny that the investigation of the assassination was insufficient."

Ford, who was House minority leader at the time of his appointment to the commission, acknowledged that at one point he secretly promised a high-ranking FBI official to keep the bureau "thoroughly advised" of the commission's activities, but he declared that the arrangement lasted for only a week.

Using prepared texts to answer the questions he regarded as the most important, the former president said he offered to keep the FBI assistant director, Cartha DeLoach, informed during the course of an "internal conflict" over the commission's appointment of a chief counsel in December 1963.

FBI memos by DeLoach about the arrangement recently came to light as a result of requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

"The DeLoach memos appear to be accurate," Ford said, "but the relationship did not continue during the investigation."

Ford confirmed that the commission had not been aware of the CIA's plotting against Castro, which continued even after Kennedy's death, of the destruction of a threatening note from Lee Harvey Oswald to a Dallas FBI agent, or of a number of other items, such as disciplinary actions against 20 FBI agents and supervisors for shortcomings in the investigation of Oswald before Kennedy's murder.

Knowledge of the plotting against Castro "certainly would have required the commission to extend its inquiry into those operations," Ford said, but "I don't think they in and of themselves would have changed the conclusions of the commission."

Similarly, he said he did not think the other things that have come to light would have altered the commission's findings or even changed the course of the investigation.

Midway through his testimony, a loud crash at a door behind the committee rostrum interrupted the hearing. Moments later, the public address system failed.

Sitting behind Ford, former commission member John J. McCloy leaned over to the third surviving member, John Sherman Cooper, and said with a grin:

"Sabotage. It's a conspiracy."

Capitol Police said later that a Secret Service Agent had been trying to shut a door to the huge Cannon House Office Building caucus room, despite the fact that it had been left open for a clutter of sound cables.

Under questioning by committee counsel Gary Cornwell, Ford also said the commission, to the best of his recollection, was not told that the CIA once considered using Oswald as a source of intelligence information about the Soviet Union.

The House committee, Cornwell said, has also turned up indications that "an employee at the Cuban consulate in Mexico City [where Oswald tried to get a visa in September 1963] may have been involved in the assassination and may have been a member of Cuban intelligence."

"We were not informed," Ford replied.

Cornwell would not elaborate, but he appeared to be referring to a former employee of the Cuban consulate who ducked the committee's investigators when they tried to interview him; and finally refused to speak with them when they located him by happenstance.

According to an informed source, the CIA apparently intercepted an ambiguous conversation by the individual in question, after the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination in Dallas. He reportedly said something to the effect that "we knew it before Kennedy did."

Asked about Cornwell's remark, a spokesman for the Cuban Interest Section here professed surprise. He said committee members and staffers made no mention of the tentatively phrased allegation during either of their two visits to Havana this year.

"Apparently Cuba has to be mentioned daily despite what we say and despite the cooperation we've given," he protested.

In his testimony, former senator Cooper said the commission did have its disagreements, especially over the question of whether a single bullet hit both Kennedy and Texas governor John B. Connally, but this still "did not alter the conclusion of the committee that Oswald was the lone assassin. We did our best. We found what we could at the time."

"We had no rush to judgment," McCloy added. "I not only feel we had no credible evidence of a conspiracy. I feel the weight of the evidence was against a conspiracy."

J. Lee Rankin, who served as general counsel to the commission, and former attorney general Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach, who had urged that it be created, testified in the afternoon.

A former solicitor general, Rankin said he was shocked and "very much disappointed about some of the things that have been revealed" in recent years.

Personality Parade

Q. I have come across the name Mary Bancroft in connection with Henry R. Luce, founder of the Time magazine publishing empire; Allen Dulles, director of the CIA; and Carl Jung, the great Swiss psychiatrist. Who is or was Mary Bancroft? Certainly she must have been one of the world's most fascinating women to have attracted three such famous men.
—G.D., Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

A. Mary Bancroft is one of the world's most fascinating women. She was born in Cambridge, Mass., in 1903, daughter of Hugh Bancroft, later publisher of The Wall Street Journal. She was educated at Smith College but left to marry journalist Sherwin Badger, whom she divorced. She subsequently married a Swiss banker, moved to Switzerland in the 1930's and became a friend of Carl Jung, the analytical psychologist who was once a close disciple of Sigmund Freud. When World War II broke out, Allen Dulles became our OSS (Office of Strategic Services) spy chief in Bern, Switzerland, and Mary Bancroft became his secretary and confidante. She was also a confidante of Henry R. Luce and Britt Haden, the Yale graduates who founded Time magazine.

A beautiful, sexy, forthright, intelligent and outspoken woman, Mary Bancroft was attracted to strong and talented men, and vice versa. Today, at 75, she is the author of two novels, "Upside Down in the Magnolia Tree" and "The Insufferables." She lives in New York City, had two children and six grandsons, among them John Taft, reporter for the Lowell (Mass.) Sun. Her daughter Mary Jane is married to Horace Taft, dean of Yale and son of the late Sen. Robert Taft. Her autobiography, if Mary Bancroft would write it, would reveal much about many of the most noted men of her time.